

Town of Westford 2013 Strategic Planning Retreat - Session #1 – Economic Development

This session will encourage discussion on the various approaches to future economic development throughout the town, while maintaining a balance with the existing aesthetic character of the Town of Westford. Topics could include promoting development through the use of a regional Economic Target Area process, usage of State allotted Brownfield Funds, discussion of multi-modal forms of transportation, and possible improvements to the Zoning By-laws currently in effect within the five Westford Villages

Background

Based on mandates developed in the 2009 Comprehensive Master Plan, the Board of Selectmen initiated a new Economic Development Committee in June, 2012 and appointed 12 members to serve on the committee, including 9 members and 3 alternate members. Of the 12 members, 3 are Town Representatives, and 9 are Westford residents.

Current EDC members are:

Andrea Peraner-Sweet – Board of Selectmen (Liaison to BOS)

Jodi Ross – Town Manager

Chris Kluchman – Director of Land Use Management (Liaison to Planning Board)

Tom Barry – Chair

Perti Vulli

Bill Nussbun – Vice Chair

Stephan Cannellos (Alternate)

Ron Caterino

Peter Dervan (Alternate)

Eli Demetri

Tom West (Alternate)

Andrew Stern

Committee Charge as developed by the Board of Selectmen:

- Advise the Board of Selectmen and other town boards on issues concerning bylaws, policies, regulations, and zoning that foster commercial growth, strengthen the local economy, and are consistent with maintaining the character of our community
- Encourage business investment in commercial zoning districts, increasing the commercial tax base, while minimizing the impact on local services
- Identify changing economic trends and develop recommendations to maximize interest in our community and attract these potential new businesses
- Assist with generating local employment opportunities
- Advocate for state and federal grants, incentives, or for improvement in regulations that help advance our economic priorities
- Promote Westford's identity in the Greater Boston/MetroWest/495/Merrimack Valley area
- Establish relationships and improve communication with local businesses; act as a liaison for our town in the business community
- Represent our town in the local and regional business associations
- Make recommendations to streamline permitting, licensing, and other regulatory functions; help new business owners navigate our permitting process

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Current activities of the Economic Development Committee: In its short existence, the EDC has taken on a number of projects, all of which are intended to support the 2009 Master Plan and the BOS Committee Charge. All activities of the EDC are geared towards developing a public/private partnership that advocates for a balance between economic growth and quality of life in Westford.

In the 2009 Master Plan, under "Economic Development Assets and Liabilities" it listed the following items as assets: favorable location, single tax rate, highly educated work force, household wealth, reasonable cost of living (compared to Boston west), favorable rents and overall quality of life. It also listed the following items as shortfalls: slow development review process, complicated zoning, lack of trained volunteers on boards and committees, failure to implement previous master plans, inconsistent town staffing, lack of outreach to the business community and lack of sewer service.



Our activities to date have included:

Development of the Small Business Permitting Guide – speeds up the review process and simplifies and clarifies the requirements, enabling small businesses to quickly navigate through the permitting process thereby saving them time and money.

Filed application for designation of Westford as an Economic Target Area (ETA). We are attempting to join the 495 Regional Technology Center ETA with Littleton and Boxborough. Our application, filed on May 17, 2013 with the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) will be considered, and hopefully approved at their meeting on June 26, 2013. Designation as an ETA will allow Westford to apply for Federal and State Brownfield funds for use in cleaning up former industrial sites such as those located at 12 North Main Street (Westford Anodizing) and 8 Brookside Road (cold storage building).

ETA designation will also allow for the use of Tax Incentive Financing (TIF's) to encourage large businesses to build and locate in Westford, as well as helping existing Westford businesses to expand in Westford, both geared to job growth and strengthening the local economy while maintaining the character of our community.



Business outreach to establish relationships and improve communication with local businesses –



The EDC held its first EDC/Business Breakfast meeting on June 6th hosted by Juniper Networks. In addition to detailing the activities of the EDC, all of which will benefit the business community, business leaders were appraised of current residential and business development, regional transportation and accessibility efforts, Minots Corner construction plans and timetable, and a discussion to determine what educational background businesses are seeking in new hires.

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Business Mailing Database – The EDC is working to update the business database including all Westford businesses in an effort to provide outreach to current businesses and improve communications between businesses and Town personnel. This will also be used in characterizing the current business community and assist in planning how to best foster and maintain a welcoming climate in Westford.

Westford Business Association – The EDC is working on the possible establishment of a Westford Business Association to create a forum for businesses to have an impact on Town Government. This would provide an important communications link between businesses, Town officials, and Town boards to raise issues, concerns, or suggestions on a myriad of topics affecting the business community.

Westford Business and Community Guide – The EDC is working on developing a Westford Brochure to promote the Town of Westford, businesses in the Town, and the cultural values well established in the Town. It could include Westford Town Facts, Business and Economic Development activities, Where to Stay and Eat, Recreation, Places of Interest, Education, Healthcare, etc.

Transportation Grants – In late 2012, Westford joined six other local towns in applying for a Community Innovative Challenge (CIC) Grant concerning shared transportation with all members. The grant would help to establish a Transportation Management Association to address and understand daily transportation needs for area residents, traditional commuting from area to city, suburb to suburb, and reverse commuting, and would offer programs of alternatives to driving alone to work.



Interesting Westford Facts:

Population -----21,951

Labor Force – March, 2013-----12,031

Unemployment Rate -----5.2%

Per Capita Income -----\$47,587

Commercial Vacancy Rate -----11.4% - 17.9%

Pre-permitted available office space
that remains to be built at Tech Park West ----- 525,000 sq ft

More information about the Economic Development Committee online:

http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/boardsandcommittees/WestfordMA_edc/index